

THE

# HISTORIAN

[www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com)

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

July 2012

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, July 19, 2012, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Ricky Adam, Sheriff of Hancock County, who will report on the new county jail facilities. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, July 18**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still a few months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Wednesday, October 31, 2012, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.



The mysterious ballot box

## . The Strange Case of the Purloined Ballot Box

By  
Russell B. Guerin

A reasonable beginning will be to assemble what we know, hoping that as the facts are unfurled we will be brought to a deductive reasoning of what really happened.

It appears at this point that the beginning dates back some eighty or ninety years, but we at the Historical Society were not involved until about twenty or thirty years ago, and then again, only

very recently in any truly investigative way. We will start with the report of Charles Gray, our Executive Director, who recalls the following:

*In the 1980's, my early years with the Hancock County Historical Society, neither I nor the Society had a large repository of historic information, and I had recently arrived from New Orleans. Late one afternoon I received a telephone call from a man who did not identify himself but said flatly, "Meet me on 603 at Bayou La Croix: I've got something you want." He further told me to come alone and that he would be driving a dark blue pickup.*

*I certainly could not ignore*

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"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

*an intrigue of this proportion, so I raced immediately to the appointed place and from a distance could see the pickup. I pulled up behind it, kept my motor running, and slowly lowered my window as a man in his 40's got out of the truck and came back to my car carrying something in a black garbage bag. He handed it to me through the window, and as he turned quickly to return to his truck he said, "If you tell anybody where you got this, you'll be killed." As I drove away, he was seated in his vehicle.*

*Back home I opened the package to discover a mysterious box which contained folded pieces of paper with men's names on them, but I had no source then to identify or date the contents. It remained tucked away, first at my home, and then later at the Society until recently when Russell Guerin began searching our records and then the computer for the answers we needed.*

We can only surmise about the motives of the messenger. Perhaps it was a case of a dormant conscience just come to life. Maybe some of the people involved had died away and there was no one remaining to implicate. We do not know.

Here is what we do know. A crude, yellow, wooden box—the paint powdery and the wood worn—had a slit in its lid and contained an assortment of handwritten paper ballots. The names of three people were prominent in our county: Moran, Cuevas, and Weston. Two names were preceded by an initial, and the other two disclosed only nicknames. There is a fourth name, one Bobinger, about whom we know little. Such information did not make anything easier.

In addition, two typewritten lists were included, one appearing to be a list of qualified voters in the

area of Kiln, Rocky Hill, and Fenton for 1951-1952, and the other for 1953.

It was initially thought that the dates of these lists indicated the period of an election for which the ballots had been taken. It was that false assumption which discouraged further investigation at the time, as none of the names on the ballots held true for any elections of the period of the early '50's. Now, however, as we identify the players, it is believed that they represent a period long before the 1950's and that the lists were probably casually thrown into the box as a repository of miscellaneous election papers, having nothing to do with the elections represented by the paper ballots.

Perhaps it was intended that any curious observer be thrown off. Another consideration is that the lists were purposely enclosed in order to identify the area. Such is the nature of intrigue. It causes many guesses, most of them wrong.

Current analysis shows that the ballots are of two sorts. One contains the names Cy Cuevas and Coney Weston; the other lists M. Bobinger and S. Moran. It appears that these were two separate races. Voters were given two small slips of paper each. They were offered a choice between Cuevas and Weston on the one hand and between Bobinger and Moran on the other. The names are handwritten, often in the same penmanship. The voters each made a single check mark on each slip.

A few ballots remain in envelopes with names on the front of the envelope presumably identifying the voter. These envelopes were all slit open from the top. Perhaps they represented absentee ballots.

We believe we can identify those persons of the first sort and possibly one of the second. We

identify Cy Cuevas a Victor Cyrille Cuevas, born on November 15, 1882, and married to Rosa Biaggne. He died June 25, 1940. His father was also named Cyrille, and it would have been the father who signed a deed on August 8, 1893, dedicating land for the Rotten Bayou Cemetery.

Coney Weston was Daniel Coney Weston, who was born in 1866 and died in 1923. He was buried in the Logtown cemetery. Coney was the son of Henry Weston, one of the important Westons of Weston Mill fame.

Microfilm of the *Sea Coast Echo* has two extensive articles about the death and funeral of Mr. Weston. They speak highly of the character of the man, his generosity, and his place in the Weston family. However, neither mentions any ambitions in local politics.

In the contest between Cuevas and Weston, the ballots have obviously been tallied and totaled. There are two such tally sheets, using "chicken scratches"; they agree, giving 125 votes to Cuevas and 97 to Weston.

Of the second sort, we believe S. Moran to be Sylvester Moran, but know practically nothing of Mr. Bobinger.

Sylvester G. Moran appears in one record as having been born in 1893, although the 1880 census carries him as a one-year old, the son of Leon, a thirty-three-year old farmer in District 4. Someone named James Sylvester Moran died in 1959 at age sixty-seven. He is buried in Rotten Bayou cemetery. He would have been born about 1892 and could be Sylvester G., above. Sylvester S. Moran is also on the 1853 list. Perhaps a different person was S. T. Moran, born November 1877; he died in April 1926.

There is no indication that the Bobinger/Moran votes were

ever counted. There is no tally sheet, the only known count being done by this writer. Incidentally, it comes to 134 for Bobinger and 112 for Moran.

The Lobrano House and its data bases offer a number of ways to identify people who have lived, worked, and died in Hancock County. One of the more important sources is our extensive record of cemeteries and deaths. It is the use of the latter, the record of deaths, which discloses the first clue as to when the election might have taken place. What is found is that Daniel Coney Weston died on April 13, 1923.

Another source of information is the microfilm collection of the *Sea Coast Echo* (located in the public library) which dates back to 1892. Here it is found that there was in fact an election in 1923, but primaries and the election were not held until months after Weston died. Nonetheless, to be safe, it was checked to see whether his name might have remained on the ballot after his death; it did not. Hence, the death of Weston showed that the 1923 election could not have been the one for which we are searching. It had to be earlier, perhaps in 1919.

Three articles were found for the 1919 election. In the first, the *Echo* reports that Victor C. Cuevas [Cy] on July 26 announced for Supervisor of Beat 4. At the same time, Sylvester L. Moran is shown running for County Tax Assessor against F. C. Bordages, Sr., and Sylvester L. Toquet. No mention is made of Bobinger.

On August 9, it was reported that a second primary would be necessary between J. P. Moran and Victor C. Cuevas in the Beat 4 contest. If Coney Weston ran, he did not make the second primary.

Also, in the assessor balloting, S. S. [Sylvester] Moran re-

ceived 227 votes against 721 for Bordages and 128 for Toquet. Bordages was therefore elected with more than fifty percent of the vote. Once more, no mention is made of Bobinger.

Results were posted on August 30, 1919, showing Moran had defeated Cuevas by 124 to 113 in the race for Supervisor, District 4. This was not the "S. Moran" on our paper ballots running for Tax Assessor, but Joseph P. Moran.

Thus, we conclude the election of 1919 to be the one represented in our yellow wooden box. The locus was Beat (District) 4 of Hancock County. Again, to be safe, we studied two earlier elections for the same names as those on our ballots. In 1915, Sylvester Moran ran for Treasurer, but none of our other subjects seemed to be in the mix. In 1911, two Morans ran for Assessor, the Honorable Alcide Moran and Joseph P. Moran, but none of the people of our study were included in any of the contests.

An attempt to find any relevant articles concerning a possible challenge to the election met with little success. A routine report of the Board of Supervisors was published on March 6, 1920. It identified the members as W. E. Thigpen, Calvin Shaw, Joseph Moran, and Joseph Favre, confirming that not one of the candidates named in our ballots was elected.

Possible evidence that there was no general knowledge of a compromised election appeared on March 13, 1920, when the *Echo* gave an account of the March term of the Grand Jury, indicating that twenty-seven witnesses had been examined and two indictments had been returned. The details could not be revealed, but an interesting comment was made by the jury foreman: "We are pleased to report that there has [sic] been very little violations of the law in the past six months; that the prohibition law is

being observed, and the officers of the county charged with the enforcement of the various laws seem to be discharging their respective duties efficiently."

The search for anything significant in *Echo* articles was continued through July of 1920 with nothing more relevant than the above. If any contest of the election was made, no article in the *Echo* has been found.

A request has been made of the Registrar of Voters to contact the Mississippi Attorney General's office for any information it may have about the 1919 election. We are told that such a record probably no longer exists, but in the event that further information is forthcoming, another posting will follow.

The ballots in our possession had to be only first primary votes. Perhaps the reason Bobinger is not in evidence anywhere in the reports is

that he did not get enough votes to be reported. Perhaps the fact that these ballots were never officially reported accounts for the lack of showing on the part of the four named on our ballots.

The end result is that none of our cast of characters were elected. All were also-rans. This begs the question: if in fact the ballots in the box were never counted, might there have been a difference in the outcome of the election? Moreover, this could be an indication of other tampering for which there is no longer evidence.

On balance, the case of the yellow wooden box and all its scraps of paper remains a mystery.

If nothing else, light is shown on the progress which has been made in a couple of generations. No longer do we see the evi-

dence of painful writing by hand of names on small pieces of paper, almost all written in the same hand. Nor do we have to rely on pencil checkmarks. Nicknames and first initials—which made our identity search difficult—are unacceptable to today's voters.

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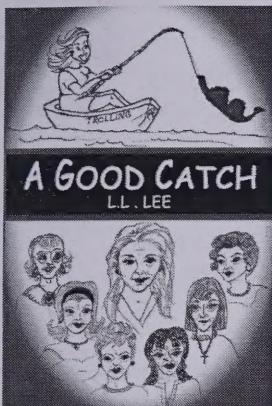
Recent visitors to the Kate Lobrano House were Mrs. Lobrano's great-granddaughter, Janis Balsamo of Houston, TX, (left), and her granddaughter, Joyce Balsamo of Metairie, LA.



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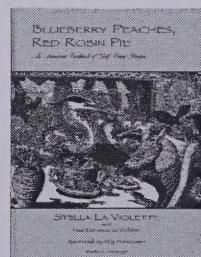
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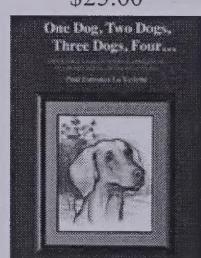
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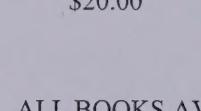
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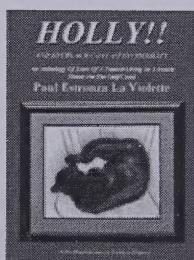
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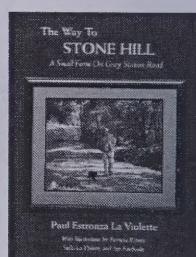
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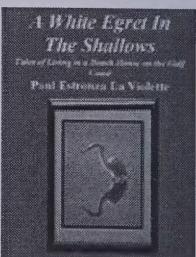
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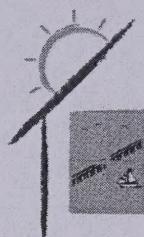


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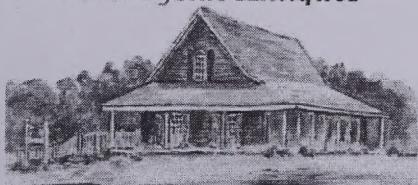


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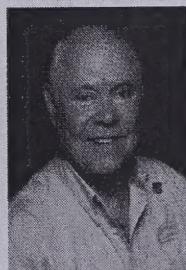
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